



Department of Justice

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HOGSETT ANNOUNCES FEDERAL BUST OF EVANSVILLE- AREA METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING RING

Six defendants arrested this morning as part of crackdown on local drug organizations

PRESS RELEASE

EVANSVILLE – U.S. Attorney Joseph H. Hogsett announced today the early morning arrest of six Evansville residents who are alleged to have engaged in a scheme to obtain and distribute large quantities of methamphetamine. This case comes on the heels of two additional federal methamphetamine busts in the Evansville area in recent weeks, and Hogsett said these prosecutions are part of a concerted effort by the U.S. Attorney's Office to crackdown on drug trafficking in the area.

"The scourge of methamphetamine has weighed heavily on Evansville and communities across Southwestern Indiana," Hogsett said. "That is why we are working with our local partners to send a message that we won't tolerate anyone who seeks to make their living by bringing drugs and death into our neighborhoods."

According to a federal indictment unsealed this afternoon, six individuals have been charged with participating in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. Beginning in November 2011, it is alleged that Joshua Chaffin, age 29, was the leader and supervisor of a scheme that obtained and distributed large quantities of the drug in the Evansville area.

Chaffin was allegedly aided by William Hollis, age 31, and Travis Sutton, age 30, who would assist in the distribution of methamphetamine to other members of the drug trafficking organization. Those mid-level distributors included Gary Winstead, Jr., age 32, and Michael Hartweck, age 28.

Throughout the conspiracy, it is alleged that the methamphetamine was "fronted" to drug dealers, where they would be provided methamphetamine, and would then pay back the drug traffickers after the drugs had been sold. The indictment includes charges against Jennifer

Chumley, age 25, who is alleged to have collected these debts owed to the organization as part of the scheme.

The defendants allegedly used cell phones to coordinate the methamphetamine trafficking operation. During the course of the conspiracy, the defendants used code language in their phone calls and text messages in an attempt to keep their criminal activity hidden, and would frequently dispose of their phones and purchase new ones. The conspiracy also used a number of properties across the city to store drugs and money related to the scheme, including properties at 1613 Beckman Avenue, and 1841 Belmar Lane.

This investigation was the result of outstanding law enforcement work by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Drug Enforcement Administration agents in Evansville. Local partners included task force officers from the Evansville - Vanderburgh County Drug Task Force, the Vanderburgh County Sheriff's Department, and the Evansville Police Department.

Hogsett also cited the work of Assistant U.S. Attorney Lauren Wheatley, a former Vanderburgh County deputy prosecutor who is prosecuting this case for the government, as well as a number of other high-profile drug trafficking cases in the Evansville area. According to Wheatley, all six of the defendants face ten years to life imprisonment if they are found guilty. They also face significant fines and the possibility of years of federal supervision after their prison terms are served.

An indictment is only a charge and are not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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